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THE ROLE OF THE AMBASSADOR

Especially during this transition period, and also after it, because of the limitations inevitably inherent in the fact that the Secretary and the Department are a part of a very large executive branch, the role of the ambassador will be particularly important.

"The President's man"

To meet the nation's needs, it seems rather clear that, in fact, as well as in reluctant and grudging observance of ancient international tradition, an American ambassador must be "the President's man."

Of particular relevance to such a reappraisal is *The Secretary of State and the Ambassador*, published in 1964 with a foreword by Senator Henry M. Jackson, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on National Security Staffing and Operations. It is difficult to add to this exceptionally perceptive summary, taken from the Jackson Subcommittee papers on the conduct of American foreign policy. The intervening four years have served to underscore, rather dramatically, in some cases, the basic validity of their findings.

The use of the phrase "the President's man" serves to underscore the fact that an ambassador cannot function properly as the representative of any agency or department, not even the Department of State. Even if drawn from the career

Foreign Service, he cannot function as a member of the Foreign Service of the United States, although a prudent concern for the future of our country would indicate that the preponderance of ambassadors should be drawn from that Service. A preponderance but not the totality, for the nation must always be able to reach out for a David Bruce, an Ellsworth Bunker, or a Douglas Dillon, examples of the gifted non-professionals who have served as ambassadors with great distinction.

It is remarkable how little known is the actual fact that an ambassador drawn from the Foreign Service is suspended from that Service the moment that he takes his oath of office as ambassador. The framers of the Foreign Service Act of 1946, clearly recognizing this necessity, wisely provided this separation and carried it to the point of specifying in Article 519 that the reintegration into the Foreign Service, upon the completion of his mission, of an ambassador drawn from its ranks should not be automatic, but accomplished by a positive act of reassignment. If not reassigned within ninety days after relinquishing his status as an ambassador, a Foreign Service officer is automatically retired.

For the audience served by *THE ANNALS*, it is not necessary to recall the origins and evolution of the exchange of ambassadors to facilitate the conduct of relations between chiefs of state. When absolute power was vested in chiefs of state, to be effective, or at times even to be received, it was essential that the ambassador be known "to have the ear of his Prince," to be privy to his innermost concerns, to be empowered to speak in his name, and, when necessary, to act as his plenipotentiary to bind his sovereign. It is often argued that modern communications and more recent egalitarian tradi-

tions have made most of these qualities obsolete. A bit of reflection indicates that today they are more important than ever.

We have retained the traditional language that continues a slight obeisance to tradition. The President's letter of credence is still presented by an ambassador to the chief of state, never to the head of government. While the form has been preserved, the realities, in most cases, are considerably different.

The "country team" concept

Elsewhere in this article, there is comment on certain apparently immutable bureaucratic relationships which will inevitably impose various limitations on the Secretary and the Department. The new President, the new Secretary of State, and his principal Departmental assistants must guard in every possible way against the transfer abroad of these inevitable Washington pressures and limitations.

It is suggested that the first step should be thoroughly to re-examine the "country team" concept. The origins of this novel approach are shrouded in mystery befitting the illegitimacy of its conception. It has no basis in statute, executive order, or regulation. Its main defect is that it perpetuates Washington techniques under the illusion that their transference abroad will provide a workable mechanism for the "co-ordination" of the viewpoints of field representatives of sovereign and independent Washington agencies having interests in Country X.

Unless there has been a recent change, this point of view is still being disseminated at the Interdepartmental Seminar, run by the Department of State, with the assistance of the Department of Defense and other interested agencies. Its basic thrust is that the ambassador is regarded as the repre-

sentative of the Department of State, the senior department of government, and is thereby recognized as the senior representative present, entitled thereby to take the Chair.

Serious differences between agency representatives are, all too often, referred to Washington where the process of litigation, harmonization, compromise, and concurrences, again, all too often, insure that the eventual decision is either irrelevant or has already been overtaken by events. The observations of Robert A. Lovett, although made eight years ago, have an intensely immediate relevancy:

Government has now become gigantic at the very moment in history when time itself is not merely a measure, or a dimension, but perhaps the difference between life and death. . . . This huge organization would be hard enough to run if authority were given where responsibility was placed. Yet, that frequently is not the case.

Authority commensurate with responsibility

In determining the role of the ambassador, now and in the future, it must be the case that authority must be commensurate with responsibility. It can be the case if the new President, his new Secretary of State, and the principal officers of the Department determine that it will be. If we must have names for an implementing concept, a much more relevant and accurate delineation would result from the use of the concept of "The United States Diplomatic Mission." The phraseology as well as the concept have a statutory base in the language of the Foreign Assistance Act. It also has a base in international law, as it is derived from the wording of the bilateral agreements setting up our military and economic assistance missions abroad. These specify that these missions shall be consid-

ered by the host governments as part of the United States Diplomatic Mission, under the direction and control of the Chief of that Mission.

Any representative of any United States department or agency must be a component part of the United States Diplomatic Mission. This includes the embassy as the Department of State component, with the deputy chief of mission (DCM) acting as head of the State Department element and responsible for advancing its position. This is a role for the DCM over and beyond his responsibilities as the ambassador's alter ego and as second in command of the entire United States Diplomatic Mission.

The ambassador, as the personal representative of the President of the United States, must assume responsibility, in the President's name, for everything that the United States government does in the country to which he is accredited. To discharge that responsibility effectively, he must also assume command, in the President's name, of all activities of all United States personnel in the country. No ambassador worthy of being given such authority in the first place is likely to abuse it. If he does, the remedy is not to overrule him constantly, but to dismiss him.

In the few cases where this concept has already been tried, the results seem to indicate that American interests were considerably better served.

Communications

Several crucial factors are essential to the successful implementation of this expanded role which the ambassador must fill in the future. The first, and foremost, is for the new President to make it clear from the outset that he expects his ambassadors to be just that—*his* ambassadors, and require all departments to recognize that any challenge to *his* ambassador's authority will

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPERATIVES

27

be regarded as a direct challenge of the President's authority and dealt with on that basis.

Inasmuch as the Department of State is the Cabinet department charged with foreign affairs and the Secretary of State is the President's principal adviser on foreign affairs, the ambassador will normally receive his instructions from the Secretary and will report to the Secretary on the progress of his mission. However, Presidents have, from time to time, used other channels, and any consequent limitation on the Department and the Secretary cannot similarly limit the ambassador. Direct communication with the President should be rare, but the ambassador must exercise the right of direct access to the President on matters which, he believes, require the President's personal intervention.

Another element crucial to the success of the ambassador's expanded role is that of American communication channels. Normally, he will use the Department of State channels. But, as the President's representative, all channels, including the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) are available to him. Similarly, since all communications routed to or from the country to which he is accredited, dealing with any aspect of American concern or involvement with that country, involve the President's business, these communications must be available to the ambassador, if he so requests. This is essential, and he must exert whatever disciplinary measures are necessary to enforce compliance. However, it would be a very unwise ambassador who would attempt to suppress the "back-channel" messages—messages by secure channel to designated recipient without other distribution. The American military have long since developed the "back-channel" technique to the state of fine

art. It is a most useful tool to have available, particularly since an ambassador cannot be assured of similar inviolable privacy through State Department channels.

Control of access

The last crucial factor involves control of access. No compromise can be made with the ambassador's authority to exercise absolute control over access of all Americans to senior officials of the local government. This applies to the substance directed to be conveyed to a local official by a department or agency in Washington, as well as to the fact of access itself. When this is understood, local ground rules are quickly and easily achieved. But it is manifestly impossible to have different American elements in any country authorized to communicate with senior members of the local government without the knowledge of the ambassador or the Secretary of State.

President Kennedy's letter of May 29, 1961, to American ambassadors was a welcome additional step to the one previously taken by President Eisenhower, in February 1960, directing Acting Secretary of State Douglas Dillon to convey to all ambassadors the President's desire for the United States chief of mission in each country to exercise full power of co-ordination and direction over all United States government programs being conducted in that country. However, in Saigon, the effect of President Kennedy's letter was vitiated by a simultaneous letter to the General who was commanding the Military Assistance Command, authorizing him direct access, on his own initiative, to the senior officials of the South Vietnamese government, a privilege which was already exercised by the CIA station chief.

It would be difficult to find a responsible official who would now defend the

authorization of independent direct access to the South Vietnamese Chief of State and his senior officials by representatives of various Washington departments and agencies, who often had diametrically opposite counsel on how the government of South Vietnam could best meet the mounting threat of aggression. In retrospect, one might consider as apposite Samuel Johnson's comment about the dog that walked on its hind legs—the remarkable thing was not that the dog walked badly, but that it walked at all.

An instructive footnote is added with the story that on the appointment of Maxwell Taylor, a very great American, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Vietnam, the first item on the agenda of the first meeting dealing with his new responsibilities was the revocation of the letter to the Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), and the substitution of a new presidential directive to Ambassador Taylor, authorizing him to assume control over all American elements in Vietnam, including such command control over COMUSMACV as Ambassador Taylor might deem it useful to assume.

Elsewhere, other American ambassadors, without such presidential letters, assumed such authority to be implicit in their presidential commissions as ambassador, and acted accordingly. They

had been drawn from the Foreign Service of the United States, which has many more like them if the new President chooses to use them.

CONCLUSION

Many other actions suggest themselves, some of which are covered elsewhere in this volume, but the temptation to toy with peripheral matters must be resisted until the truly basic problems have been addressed. Then solutions to lesser problems become rather quickly apparent.

The major necessary actions are: a decision by the new President to resist the temptation to organize his own White House foreign office and to insist, rather, on the full implementation of NSAM 341 by the Department of State; the creation of the new position of Foreign Secretary as the second ranking post in the Department; the creation of the new post of Permanent Under Secretary; the selection of assistant secretaries and country directors who are capable of accepting, and willing to accept, the full responsibilities of the role envisaged by NSAM 341; and the full support by the new President of the role of the ambassador, as set forth above.

We may well encounter the turbulent future world forecast by Ambassador Kohler, but I fully share his confidence that we will be able to cope with it.